

The Importance of Human Resource Management in the Hotel industry in Sierra Leone

Bisolu Sylvanus Hotchinson Betts*

*Harbin University of Commerce 1Xuehai Street Harbin city, Heilongjiang province Teaching complex building,
150028 , +232 76709929/+8618845778790
Email: bettsb80@gmail.com*

Abstract

Human Resources are the most valuable and unique assets of an organization. The successful management of an organization's human resources is an exciting dynamic and challenging task, especially at a time when the world has become a global village and economies are in a state of flux. The purpose of this research is to examine the roles and functions of human resource management in the hotel industry. It also detailed with the methods used together with all relevant information about the importance of human resource management in the hotel sector and how the collected data was analyzed with the use of simple percentages tables to illustrate the research findings. Finally, are the summary, conclusion and references made by the researcher based on the findings.

Keywords: Motivation; Growth; Hotel industry; Human Interaction.

1. Introduction

Understanding diversity in human resource management (HRM) and how it is managed in different contexts is challenging [1]. This review focuses on HRM in the hotel sector. The study of HRM in the hotel sector is of particular importance because of the intensity of human resource (HR) use in this industry. Frontline employees in the hotel sector are important for the creation and provision of excellent service quality [2]. Human interaction in service delivery is typically seen as critical for customer satisfaction [3]. While research on HRM in the hospitality industry in general includes the hotel sector, the findings of such research are not necessarily generalizable to the hotel industry.

* Corresponding author

The purpose of this review is, therefore, to explore the following questions: 1) what HR practices and strategies exist in the hotel sector, and 2) why do they exist? A comprehensive review of the literature was undertaken by examining international empirical studies conducted in the hotel industry. The analysis identified the most consistently studied HR practices and the most commonly adopted HR strategies in the hotel sector in order to both deepen our understanding of why such practices exist and highlight the diverse nature of hospitality operations. Human resource management is a strategic and coherent approach of managing organization's most valued assets, the people working there individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of business objectives – Human resource management in the Hotel Sector Functions include a variety of activities and key factor among them is deciding what staffing needs you have in recruiting and training the best professional employees, ensuring they are high performers, dealing with performance issues and ensuring that personnel and management practices conform to various regulations – Activities also include managing approach to employee benefits and compensation in the hospitality industry, employee records and personnel policies. Usually small business (profit or nonprofit making) will have to carry out these activities themselves because they can't afford part or full-time help. However, they should always ensure that employees have and aware of personnel policies which conform to current regulations. These policies are often in the form of employee manuals which all employees should have read, signed and kept. Human resources are the most valuable and unique assets of a hotel. The successful management of a hotel's human resource is an exciting, dynamic and challenging task, especially at a time when the world has become a global village and economics are in a state of flux. The security of talented resources and the growing expectations of the modern day hotel worker have further increased the complexity of the human resource function. Even though specific human resource functions/activities are the responsibility of the human resource department, the actual management of human resource is the responsibility of all the managers in an organization or hotel. It is therefore necessary for all managers to understand and give due importance to the different human resource policies and activities in the hotel. The theoretical discipline is primarily based on the assumption that employees are individuals with varying goals and needs and as such should not be thought of as basic business resources, such as trucks and filing cabinets. Human Resource Management is seen by practitioners in the field as a more innovative view of workplace management than the traditional approach. Its technicians force the managers of hotels to express their goals with specific so that they can be understood and undertaken by the work force and to provide the resources needed for them to successfully accomplish their assignments. As such, human resource management technicians when properly practiced are expressive of the goals and operating practices of the hotel overall. Human resource management is also seen by many to have a key role in risk reduction with hotels.

2. Material and methods

This article conducts a systematic review of the literature on HRM in the hotel sector [4]. The literature search was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, similar to the search strategy adopted in the review article by Author, three primary online databases were identified: Business Source Premier (EBSCO), Pro Quest Business, and Science Direct [5]. Next, eight tourism and hospitality management journals included in these databases were chosen on the basis of previous review studies. The selected journals were Anatolia, Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration, International Journal of Hospitality Management, Journal of Human

Resources in Hospitality and Tourism, Managing Leisure and Tourism Management. A systematic search was conducted using the keywords “Human Resource Management (HRM)”, “Human Resource Practices”, “Human Resource Strategy” and “Hotel/s” within these journals. The keywords were identified based on the research questions. The initial search results provided an inadequate sample for the review to be meaningful and, therefore, the second phase involved extending the search to include management and HRM journals included in the same databases. The papers were filtered first by reading the abstract and then by reading the full article. The inclusion criterion was that the article had to be an empirical study that discussed HRM in hotels. Empirical studies on restaurants and the fast-food industry were excluded. The filtering resulted in 27 papers that fit the criteria. Content analysis was then used to classify the remaining papers. The empirical studies were classified according to research context, sample, method, evidence of HRM practices, and outcome variables. Of the 27 hotel sector articles, 6 adopted a qualitative interview method while the remaining 21 used survey methods. The empirical studies were conducted in 14 different hotels including the Radisson bleu hotel, the New Brookfield’s hotel, Bintumani hotel, Atlantic Lumley beach hotel, Sierra light house, Bamoi hotel and the Hotel and Tourism Training Center(MMCET –Brookfield’s Campus) in Sierra Leone.

2.1. Purpose of the Research

Reference [6] the purpose of this research can be exploratory, descriptive and well detailed. According to Author, these categories are not mutually exclusive; they are a matter of emphasis. As any research study will change and develop over time, one can identify more than one purpose. Other research methods used for this study were as follows:

2.2. Target Population

The population selected for this research was from the hotel industry, such as hotels, restaurants, national tourist board and MMCET Brookfield’s Campus. A total number of fifty (50) respondents served as sample. The choice of their selection was based on their knowledge and role play toward the development of the hotel industry. It was done on a random basis where every respondents or sample had earned chance to be selected. Both male and female employees were targeted to ensure gender balance.

2.3. Sample Selection

Amongst the fifty 50 respondents, ten are staff of the National Tourist Board, thirty staff from fourteen hotels in Western Area, and ten staff from the Hotel and Tourism Training Center (MMCET) Brookfield’s campus. However the sample size of hotels was based only 27 empirical studies were found to have been conducted in the hotel sector nationally, mainly in large scale hotels within the western area.

2.4. Data Collection

The sources of data methods were used. Primary and secondary respectively. Under the secondary source of data the following were used. Internet, text books, newspapers, Journals, data published by agencies under the World Tourism Organization.

2.4.1. Research Instrument

The main instrument used in this research work is a structured Questionnaire which was administered to investigate the importance of human resource management in hotel operations in Sierra Leone. About one hundred (100) Questionnaires were structured and administered; it was only fifty (50) Questionnaires that were returned.

2.4.1.1. Questionnaire

A total of 100 Questionnaire were structured and administered amongst the selected respondents. Only fifty were returned filled out. The reason for the use of the Questionnaire was because of the size of the population, cost and time in administering. The Questionnaires were directed towards the importance of human resource management in the hotel industry. They were short and straight forward.

2.4.1.2. Personal Interview

Series of personal interviews were conducted among the respondents. Interviews were conducted among the respondents. Interview booking were always made and the topic for discussion was given before the final interview. The reason for the use of this method was that some staff members may have not been able to answer to the Questionnaire and their views are of vital importance to the topic. All the interviews were conducted in a conducive atmosphere. Another reason for using this method was to get first-hand information from those working with establishments in the tourism hotel industry.

2.4.1.3. Observation

So many visitations were made at these establishments during the peak and off seasons. The reason for this method was to observe and see what the reality is on the ground in relation to how these establishments are delivering Quality Services to visitors visiting the country. It was necessary to observe how Sierra Leoneans perceived the development of hotels human resource management especially their short comings.

2.4.1.4. Discussion

The researcher had direct interaction with employees within the hotel industry. These discussions were in the form of brainstorming. Questions were thrown to the respondents and were discussed together. All the discussions were geared towards the assessment of the importance of human resource management in hotel operations in the country.

3. Data Analysis and Presentation

The collected data were analyzed in relationship to the importance of human resource management to the hotel operations in Sierra Leone. It is divided into sections, demography, human resource management policies functions and importance.

Table 1.1: Describes the position of respondents.

POSITION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Top management	5	10%
Line managers	8	16%
Supervisors	12	24%
Front line staff	25	50%
Total	50	100%

From table 1-1 above 10% of the respondents are top management, 16% are middle managers, 24% are supervisors and 50% are front line staff. It can be concluded that more of the respondents are front line staff as compared to top management. The reason is more of the front line staffs were interviewed since they formed bulk of the employees.

Table 1.2: Describes the age of respondents.

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
15 – 30	18	36%
31 – 45	22	44%
46 – 65	10	20%
Total	50	100%

From table 1.2 above, 36% of the respondents are in the age group of 15 - 30, 44% are in the age group of 31 - 45 and 20% are in the group of 46 - 65. It can be concluded that majority of the respondents are in the age group 31 - 45 with 44% as compared to the age group of 46 - 65 with 20%. The reason is that the hotel work force is dominated with this age group.

Table 1.3: Describes the gender of the respondents.

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Male	19	38%
Female	31	62%
Total	50	100%

From table 1.3 above, 38% of the respondents are male and 62% are female. It can be concluded that more of the respondents interviewed are female. The reason is that the hotel industry is dominated with female staff.

Table 1.4: Describes the educational background of the respondents.

QUALIFICATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Certificate	13	26%
Diploma	20	40%
HND/HTC	10	20%
First Degree	5	10%
Master's	2	4%
Total	50	100%

From table 1.4 above, 26% of them are holders of certificate, 40% are holders of diploma, 20% are holders of HND/HTC. 10% are holders of First Degree and 4% are holders of masters. It can be concluded that more of the respondents interviewed are holders of diploma as compared to masters. The reason is the cost duration availability of courses and entry requirement.

Table 1.5: Describes the functions of the human resource manager.

FUNCTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Recruitment	10	20%
Planning	12	24%
Motivation	6	12%
Evaluation	8	16%
Industrial relations	3	6%
Provision of services	4	8%
Education, Training and Development	7	14%
Total	50	100%

From table 1.5 above, 20% of the functions lies with recruitment 24% lies with planning, 12% lies with motivation, 16% lies with evaluation, 6% lies with industrial relations, 8% lies with provision of services and 14% lies with education, training and development. It can be concluded that major function to be performed by the HRM is planning as compared to industrial relations. The reason is all of the above functions are properly factored and analyzed under planning.

Table 1.6: Describes the steps in developing a human resource policy.

POLICY	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Identification of needs	11	22%
Goal of the human resource policy	10	20%
Development of the policy	9	18%
Review of the policy	6	12%
Submit the policy to management for review	7	14%
Review of the legal implication	4	8%
Implementation	3	6%
Total	50	100%

From table 1-6 above, 22% of the steps lies with identification of needs, 20% lies with goal of the human resource policy, 18% lies with development of the policy, 12% lies with review of policy, 14% lies with

submitting the policy to management for review, 8% lies with review of the legal implication and 6% lies with implementation. It can be concluded that all of the above steps are in sequence and all are important. With the consequences of unacceptable behavior, the reason is that today in Sierra Leone; most people are recruited on the basis of political affiliation, tribe, region etc. As a result most hotels lack discipline among its staff

Table 1.7: Describes what the hotel has to be cleared with staff.

PURPOSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Nature of the Hotel	12	24%
Expectations from the Hotel	10	20%
Expectations from Staff	9	18%
Policies and Procedures	8	16%
Acceptable and Unacceptable behavior	6	12%
Consequences of unacceptable behaviors	5	10%
Total	50	100%

From table 1-7 above, 24% of the purposes lie with the nature of the hotel, 20% lies with the expectations from the hotel by staff, 18% lies with the expectations from staff by the hotel, 16% lies with the policies and procedures, and 12% lies with acceptable and unacceptable behavior and 10% lies with the consequences of unacceptable behavior. It can be concluded that more of the purposes lies with the nature of hotel as compared.

Table 1.8: Describes problems affecting the HRM in hotels.

PROBLEMS	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Pay package	10	20%
Outside interference	14	28%
Management policies	8	16%
Training and skills	18	36%
Total	50	100%

From table -18 above, 20% of the problems lies with pay package for the HRM, 28% lies with outside interference from either board members or politicians, 16% lies with management policies and 36% lies with training and skills. It can be concluded that more of the problems facing the HRM lies with training and skills of those who the hotel employs as their HRM. The reason is that because they lack the basic training and skills hotels like Bintumani have suffered from strike action as a result of the incompetence of their HRM.

4. Summary

This section presents an overview of the findings of the empirical studies that fit this review's selection criteria. As noted in the previous section, HRM practices have been investigated both at the individual level and organizational level [7]. The individual level relates to how individual employees and managers perceive HRM

practices, while the organizational level relates to a firm's "HRM system" and takes into account a "bundle" or cluster of HRM practices. However, most empirical studies under review examined HRM practices separately rather than combining these practices as an HRM system. Table 1.1 shows that the most commonly studied HRM practices were training, staffing, pay and rewards, performance appraisals, and work organization. Work organization includes job design, planned team briefings, quality circles and teamwork [8]. Examining the HRM practices in 46 hotels in the United States, Chow, found a significant relationship between the hotel size and the implementation of HRM practices. They also showed that HRM practices were more formalized in larger firms and greater in number. Based on their findings, the authors argue that usage of HRM practices differs with the type of facility (e.g. economy hotels vs. resorts). Analysis of the empirical studies revealed that training is the most consistently studied HRM practice [9]. Reported that HRM practices in the Australian luxury hotel sector are geared towards training and skills development and achieving functional flexibility. Further, new employees in a hotel typically receive initial induction training and then on-the-job training. Functional flexibility initiatives such as multi-skilling and cross-functional training programs are also common in the sector. Multi-skilling initiatives involve expanding the role of the employee, enabling him/her to work in various departments such as restaurants, bars or even housekeeping [10]. Managers in the Australian context emphasized that multi-skilling initiatives had led to greater job variety, thereby increasing staff retention and service quality. In a study of 70 international hotels in Taiwan, examined the benefits of cross-functional training using a sample of frontline supervisors. Their sample consisted of multiskilled supervisors and a control group of non-multi-skilled supervisors. The findings suggest that functional flexibility through cross-functional training can improve service quality and reduce staff turnover problems. Furthermore, the authors found that cross-functional training positively related to job satisfaction and career development of employees. Chen and Tseng argue that cross-functional training can make employees' skills more flexible and facilitate functional flexibility. Thus, training is helpful for enhancing employees' ability to perform a variety of tasks in different departments and focuses on moving employees easily from one task to other. In this way, hotels can cope with the cyclical variation in customer demand by filling vacancies via the movement of flexible workers across and between departments [11]. Cross-functional training is, therefore, one way that hotels can increase their functional flexibility [12]. Benefits include improving cross-departmental communication and understanding as well as better customer service, reduced turnover, and enhanced internal promotions [13]. Most of research on HRM in the hotel sector also focuses on staffing in terms of recruitment and selection. Staffing policies in many countries are dominated by numerical flexibility and contingent workforce due to seasonal demand [14]. Large-scale hotels are more likely to have a specialized HRM department to handle recruitment and selection [15]. Investigated the staffing practices of 81 Scottish hotels and found that compared to small-scale hotels the large hotels tend to place more value on structured staffing procedures. The large hotels utilized multiple recruitment sources such as referrals from existing staff, government agencies, and advertising. Widely used selection methods included one-on-one interviews and application forms. Further, large-scale chain hotels tended to have centralized staffing practices controlled by head office and a more holistic approach to employee selection [16]. This holistic approach included the integration of the quality objectives of the hotel and the involvement of the HRM manager as well as other heads of departments in the selection process. Interestingly, dedicated assessment centers and psychometric personality testing are not common in the hotel sector [17]. In New Zealand and Australian contexts, multiple selection methods are used in the staffing process, including realistic

job previews, trainability assessments and “multi-hiring” [18]. Describe multi-hiring as a “distinctively novel HR practice” whereby “permanent employees [are] able to work on a temporary basis in a different department of the hotel” (p.69). For example, a permanent hotel restaurant employee could do temporary work in the banqueting department when demand is high. The benefits to the hotel are that 11 employees become more familiar with work procedures and standards of quality are raised while recruitment costs are lowered. Furthermore, employees can receive additional income through multihiring [19]. Earlier research on the hotel sector found that hotels tended to adopt a Taylorism form of work organization with little evidence of attempts to empower operational-level staff. For example, a study by in 14 large New Zealand hotels showed that work was organized according to traditional Taylorism and characterized by tight control, hierarchical structure, specialization, and low discretion [20]. A more recent study by examined the use of 21 HR practices in 47 New Zealand hotels. The findings identified flexible job descriptions, work organized around teamwork, and staff involvement in setting performance goals [21]. In the Australian context, found that “luxury hotels placed much greater emphasis on enabling flexibility initiatives and the application of high commitment HRM practices” (p. 71) compared to the hotel sector in general. Large hotels placed more emphasis on formal training, staff appraisals, team building, and formal systems of grievance handling, health and safety procedures, communication systems, and policies for equal employment [22]. In addition, the authors noted that multi-skilling and flexible job design are increasingly being seen in the hotel sector [23]. In terms of pay and benefits, Davidson and Wang (2011) found that low pay was common in the Australian context from a web-based survey of 64 hotels [24]. Their findings indicate that low wages lead to skill shortages. In line with this, Ahmad and Scott (2013) showed that wages account for a high proportion of the operating costs in the Malaysian hotel sector and that managements try to curtail them as much as possible. Skill shortage is a critical issue in the Malaysian context, and the industry is highly reliant on part-time and casual staff [25]. Casual employment is associated with numerical flexibility which focuses on controlling staff numbers and reducing wages cost. However, poor pay tends to result in high employee turnover and impede functional flexibility (Knox & Walsh, 2005). In sum, these studies provide empirical insights into the diverse nature of HRM in the hotel sector and the most common HR practices adopted to overcome its unique challenges. Two key insights can be derived from these studies. First, fluctuating demand is a core characteristic of the sector, and a large number of hotels adopt temporal labor strategies to meet this challenge. Relying on contingent labor has negative consequences for hotels and employees, as mentioned above. However, it is unlikely that hotels will move away from contingent labor due to the fluctuation in demand and high labor turnover that characterize the sector. Furthermore, findings indicate that there is a tendency in the hotel sector to adopt both temporal labor strategies and high-commitment HRM simultaneously to provide solutions to these issues. Studies have shown that the hotel sector does not pursue an unequivocally low-road approach to HRM. In fact, hotels are increasingly experimenting with high-commitment HRM practices [26]. High-commitment HRM practices such as extensive training, multi-skilling and flexible job design, formal staffing procedures, and more comprehensive communication and consultation were widely seen in large-scale hotels. Secondly, hotels may vary in terms of size, location, ownership, services offered, and business strategy (competing on price vs. competing on quality), and therefore employment practices tend to vary according to the context [27]. Further research work is needed on the relationship between these variables and HRM practices. HRM in hospitality is not necessarily generalizable to the HRM in the hotel sector since significant differentiation exists among the diverse contexts .

It is, therefore, important that hospitality studies contextualize themselves within the field of HRM research. Human Resource Management is one of the most complex and challenging fields of management. It deals with the people dimension in management. Over the past eight years, various approaches to human resources management have been adopted by companies. The human resources approaches which is currently in vogue, has redefined the way people are treated and managed in the hotel context. The approach requires the employees or the workforces be treated as resources and not just as factors of production (as in the scientific approach). Human Resource Management functions are broadly classified into two categories; managerial functions and operative functions. Managerial functions include planning, organizing, directing and controlling. The operative functions. Managerial functions include planning, organizing, directing and controlling. The operative functions are related to specific activates of HRM such as recruitment, development, compensation and employee relations. HR policies are based on the organizational culture and objectives and they define the role of the HR department in a hotel. They determine the relationship between the management and the employees and the way the employees are treated.

5. Conclusion

The examination of the literature has revealed that labor turnover and skill shortages are common issues in the hotel sector in Sierra Leone [28]. Significant consequences of staff turnover include increasing replacement and training costs, loss of productivity, and impairment of service quality. Numerical and temporal labor strategies are one way to maintain a supply of mobile workers at low cost. However, temporal labor strategies may hinder functional flexibility [29]. Compared to the permanent employees, casual workers usually get lower wages and limited training opportunities and little career development. Their commitment to the hotel is low, and lack of training may result in low service quality [30]. The hospitality literature identifies some of the primary challenges in the hotel sector in the areas of service quality, training and staffing [31]. Employee skill development has a positive impact on service quality, and this practice reinforces the behavior, skills and attitudes of service employees [32]. Multiskilling and cross-functional training improves functional flexibility and reduces turnover issues [33]. Due to high employee turnover training of new employees becomes an enormous challenge. All these issues will either directly or indirectly impact the quality of the service provided to the customer. In general, the hotel sector applies a cost-minimization strategy and adopts numerical flexibility to a considerable extent. However, it is also apparent that large-scale luxury hotels are adopting more formalized, systematic HRM practices and policies. These hotels are placing greater emphasis on enabling functional flexibility and practicing high-commitment HRM practices. Developing multi-skilled staff is one strategy that hotels use to overcome fluctuations in customer demand and reduce the high employee turnover issue. Flexibility in hotel operations is also maintained through job rotation, job enrichment, cross-functional training, and multi-hiring. Investment in training activities helps employees in their career progression and can result in better service quality). On the other hand, the hotel sector is highly susceptible to fluctuating demand and, therefore, cannot ignore numerical flexibility staffing strategies [34]. The empirical evidence shows that even large hotels adopt temporal labor strategies and use contingent labor to counter fluctuating demand. This suggests that a mix of labor strategies combining functional and temporal/numerical flexibility practices would be most effective in the hotel sector. The main limitation of this systematic review is its small sample size – only 27 empirical studies were found to have been conducted in the hotel sector nationally, mainly in large-scale

hotels. However, future research can build on the insights revealed here by investigating variations in HRM across hotel star ratings, size, and ownership, and by exploring to what extent these factors affect the HR practices employed in hotels in Sierra Leone.

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